593 The conversation becomes animated and laughter spreads. In the dark
182 prairie the camp fires burn. Around the fire, the only protection
462 against the cold which descends, behind the frail windbreak of palms
[342] and branches hastily planted in the ground on the side where wind or
[415] rain is expected; near the baskets filled with poor objects which constitute their whole earthly treasure; lying on the ground which extends around, haunted only by other bands equally hostile and fearful, the couples, embracing tightly, are truly seen as the support of one another, the comfort, the only help against the daily difficulties and the dreamy melancholy invades the Nambikwara soul from time to time. The visitor who camps in the brush with the Indians for the first time feels tenderness as well as anguish and pity before the spectacle of this humanity so completely unprotected; crushed, apparently against the soil of a hostile land by some implacable cataclysm; naked, shivering around the hesitant fires. He circulates tip-toe among the underbrush, in the dark, avoiding crushing in his walk a hand, an arm, a trunk, whose warm reflections are seen by the light of the fires. But this misery is animated by whispering and laughter. [56] The couples clasp one another as in the nostalgia of a lost union. Their caresses, at the same time tender and candid, are not interrupted by the passage of the stranger. One senses in all
[157] of them an immense gentleness, a profound carelessness, a naive and charming animal satisfaction, and, emanating from all that, something like the most moving and credible expression of human tenderness.

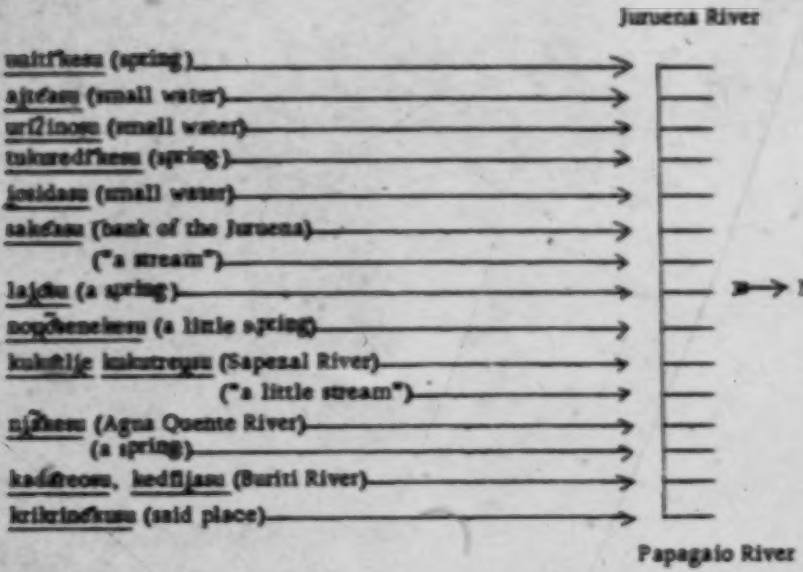
593 Thus it is not surprising that the attitude of the two sexes as con-
831 cerns one another is characterized by intense interest. This interest
462 is translated in certain cases by the vocabulary. In fact the Nambikwara
562 have only one word to express "pretty" and "young," and a single word to
[517] signify "ugly" and "old" (munjene, jeʔene, bl). Their esthetic judgments are thus based essentially on human considerations, and above all, sexual ones. But the interest which is manifested between the sexes is of a complex nature. Men judge women in a mass, as being a little different from themselves. Depending on the situation, they consider them with desire, admiration, or tenderness. In itself the confusion of terms pointed out above constitutes permanent homage. But it must not be forgotten that the form of economic adaptation realized by sexual division of labor a capital role attributes to the women, since family life rests to a very large degree (probably the greatest) on the collecting of the women, but it represents an
● [83] inferior type of activity. The ideal life is conceived on the model of agricultural production or hunting. To have plenty of manioc, and

fat pieces of meat is a constantly relished dream, even though rarely realized. On the other hand, the provisions haphazardly collected are considered—and really are—the daily misery. In Nambikwara folklore, the expression "to eat grasshoppers" (tʃigire ũrrige, bl), a typically feminine and infantile harvest, is nearly equivalent to the French "to eat the mad cow" (to rough it). At the same time the woman is considered a tender and good being, but of the second order. The language which she uses habitually separates her from the men and unites her with the children (in the same way that she collaborates with the children in expeditions of collecting and gleaning). We shall see later that this assimilation also continues into the metaphysical thinking and that, on this latter plan, discrimination between the sexes attains proportions whose psychological attitudes are only a derisive indication. It is considered well-bred for men to speak of women with a pitying good will, and, in conversations between the two sexes, to address them with a slightly mocking indulgence. Certain sayings are heard often among men speaking among themselves:

5. ũrtnoʃunatukhne jo?otnuʃutnãdnjani denesunatukhne. (bl)
The children do not know, I know, the women do not know.

and they bring up the group of women (dosu, al), their jokes, their conversations, with a tone of tenderness and mockery. But, of course, that is only [57] a social attitude. When the man finds himself alone with his wife around the camp fire, he listens to her complaints, considers her demands attentively, asks her help in a hundred undertakings. The male line of talk disappears, and gives way to the collaboration of two partners conscious of the essential value which they have for one another.

This ambiguity of male attitude as regards women has its exact correspondence in the equally ambivalent behavior of the female group. The women think of themselves collectively, and manifest it in several ways. In the first place they do not talk like the men. Even though a sexual language does not exist in the true sense of the word, in conversation a thousand inflections, shades of pronunciation are found which are typically feminine. Women articulate badly and affect a sort of jabbering which is reminiscent of infants' pronunciation. They whisper instead of talking out loud, and emit sounds with an affected mannerism and preciosity which are at times seductive when they are not exasperating. Thus, in dialect al, they give words an ending —ʃu instead of the usual—su or —tu. They also pronounce—kititu, the verbal suffix which is for men, —kedjutu or —kedjuzu.



TRADITION

The Nambikwara have a sharp sense of tradition. We have read above (p. 60) a remark of B1 which shows him to be sadly cognizant of the decline of his race. Customs and techniques are generally considered as legacies of the "ancestors":

58. irõtʃioe ikĩtage ajttige.
"The ancestors taught us how to coil it [the ribbon of rubber meant for making a ball]" (b1).

One single legend was found relating to the origin of the universe. [120] It is that of the Flood, the childrens' version of which we have already given. (1) Here is the text used by adults:

1. See above, p. 69.

59. nardõe kãũhire
narukʃ'ihire naukaurʃ'aure
nahũtende kãng-rage naukãdo urʃ'ere toãdige
the water had descended the water flooded everyone to die